

THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM · EVENT BOOKS

The Night the 8 Down Stopped

Kakori, 9 August 1925: one train, many people, and the stories that do not quite agree



Real sources. Real photographs. Every disagreement shown.

A note for parents and teachers

The Kakori train robbery of 9 August 1925 is one of the best-known events in India's freedom struggle. It is also an uncomfortable one: a passenger was killed, three earlier robberies cost three villagers their lives, and four young men were hanged. This book tells it through the people who were there, and the people who were not, and it does not decide for you who the heroes are.

How the book was made. Every fact comes from sources that were opened and read, at least two for each chapter. Where sources disagree, a blue box says so. Where a story is a family memory or a legend, the text says that too. Nothing is invented: no made-up dialogue and no invented feelings. The new pages that connect the chapters use only facts that appear in the chapters themselves.

Who it is for. Written in plain words for readers of about ten and over, and enjoyed by adults who want the real story. It runs to about 15,000 words, so read a chapter a night.

Please read before sharing. The book describes robberies in which people died and, in Act Four, the last days of four men who were hanged. There is no gore and no glory in violence, but some chapters (especially “Two weeks in December” and “The last morning in Faizabad”) deal with a death sentence. Read them first if you want to prepare.

About the pictures. Photographs and documents with a credit line are real, from free-licence archives. The colour paintings at the start of every chapter, and the three comic pages, were made with AI to show a scene; they are labelled and are not photographs. No face has been invented. All words on the comic pages come from the chapters.

How the book is told

Think of the book as a film cut between people. Each of the four acts follows the same event from a different set of eyes. Between the acts, a dark page tells you where we are and why the next chapters matter. Three comic pages show key moments, with captions taken from the chapters.

Orange box: a hard word explained.

WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Blue box: two or more sources give different facts, and we show both instead of picking one quietly.

Talk about it

1. Green box: questions with no single right answer, at the end of each chapter.

In this book

ACT ONE: THE PLAN

1. The poet who signed himself Bismil FLAGSHIP
2. Ram and Ashfaq FLAGSHIP
3. The man who said no to Kakori

ACT TWO: THE NIGHT

4. The chain at Kakori
5. The passenger who stepped off the train
6. The one who got away from Kakori
7. In the case, but not on the train
8. Before the train: three robberies that went wrong

ACT THREE: THE HUNT

9. The police complaint written in Urdu
10. The clerk from Mathura
11. The long trial in Lucknow FLAGSHIP

ACT FOUR: THE LAST DAYS

12. Seventy-eight names for the Viceroy FLAGSHIP
13. Two days early
14. Two weeks in December FLAGSHIP
15. The last morning in Faizabad
16. Written on scraps of paper FLAGSHIP

EPILOGUE: AFTER

17. The grave, the statue and the film FLAGSHIP

After the story: Where the records disagree · Quiz · Activities · Answers · Glossary · Sources · Picture credits

The people

Six people you will follow closely. The badge shows whether the sources put them on the train.

B



Ram Prasad Bismil

Poet and leader

On the train

Born 11 June 1897, Shahjahanpur. Poet, translator and organiser of the group.

Hanged 19 December 1927, Gorakhpur

A



Ashfaqulla Khan

Poet, Bismil's friend

On the train

Born 22 October 1900, Shahjahanpur. Argued against the plan, then joined it.

Hanged 19 December 1927, Faizabad

L



Rajendra Lahiri

History student

On the train

Raised in Banaras. Named by the judge as a leader. Said to have pulled the chain.

Hanged 17 December 1927, Gonda

R



Roshan Singh

Schoolteacher and wrestler

Probably not on the train

From Nawada village. Two sources say he was not on the train; he was tried for Bamrauli. Sources differ.

Hanged 19 December 1927, Allahabad

C



Chandrashekhar Azad

The one who got away

On the train

One of about ten on the train. Never arrested. Later led the HSRA.

Never caught by the police

A



Ahmad Ali

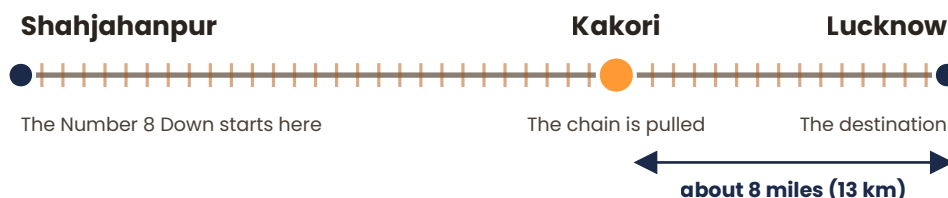
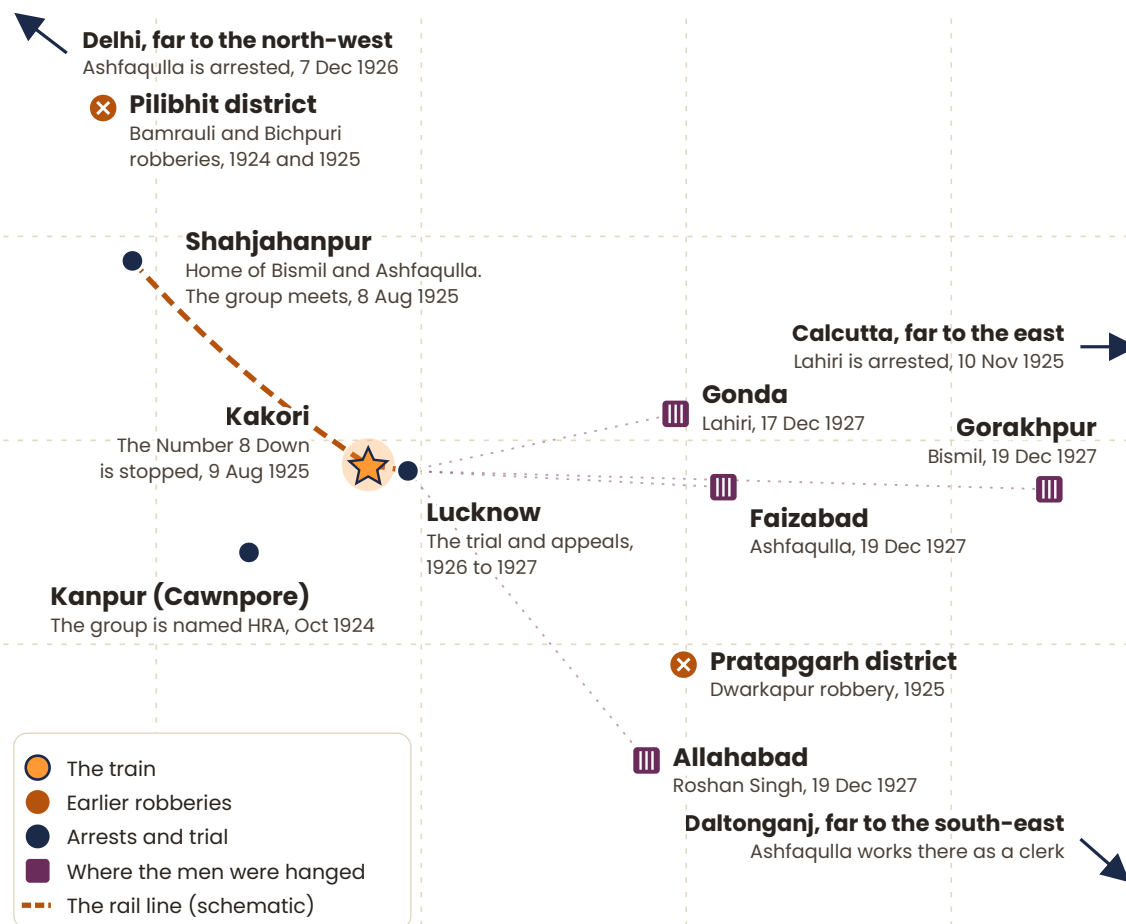
A passenger and lawyer

A passenger

Left his carriage after being warned to stay inside. Shot dead. Little else is known.

Died 9 August 1925

Where it happened



Every place on these maps appears in a chapter of this book. Positions are approximate.

Others you will meet

Manmathnath Gupta

One of the young men on the train. English Wikipedia says the fatal shot came from his pistol, by accident. Sentenced to fourteen years.

Mr Hamilton

The special judge who gave the judgment on 6 April 1927.

Pandit Jagat Narain

The famous lawyer hired by the government to argue the case.

C. B. Gupta and H. N. Misra

Two Lucknow lawyers who stood up for accused men who had nobody else.

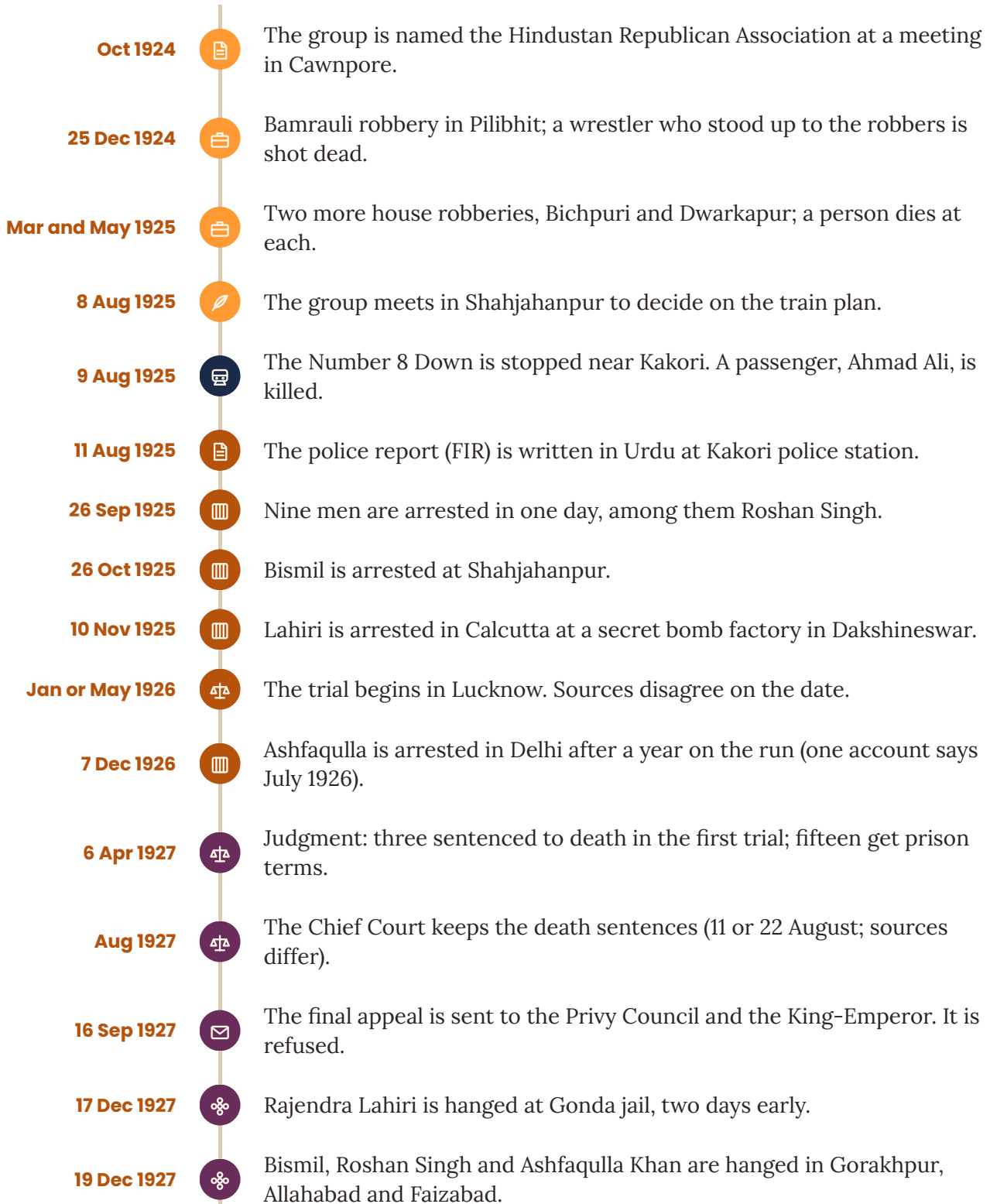
Madan Mohan Malaviya

Wrote the memorandum to the Viceroy, signed by 78 members of the Central Legislature.

Lord Irwin

The Viceroy who refused the plea.

The case in a line



Colours: the plan the night the hunt the last days

A little after seven

It is a little after seven in the evening on 9 August 1925. The Number 8 Down is running from Shahjahanpur towards Lucknow. It is an ordinary train. Passengers sit in the carriages. In the guard's van, in a metal safe, travels money that belongs to the British government.

About eight miles from Lucknow, near a small station called Kakori, someone pulls the emergency chain.

The train slows and stops. In one book's telling, two men take hold of the guard and others fire shots. The court history says the passengers are told to stay inside: no harm will come to them, because the men want only the government's money. Some of the men climb into the guard's van and break open a metal box with a hammer. In a few minutes, they have the cash.

One passenger does not stay inside.

Within two years, this one evening will lead to about forty arrests, a trial in Lucknow, a plea signed by seventy-eight members of the Central Legislature, and four hangings.

But the men on that train did not arrive there by accident. To understand the night, we have to meet them one at a time, and hear it told from each seat. The accounts do not always agree. That is part of the story.

The night in numbers



9 Aug 1925

A little after seven in the evening, the Number 8 Down is stopped near Kakori, about eight miles from Lucknow.



About 10

Young men on the train. The first police report said 20 to 25.



3 amounts

Rs 4,553-3-6, Rs 4,601-15-6 or about Rs 8,000. The records disagree.



1 death

Ahmad Ali, a lawyer, shot after leaving his carriage.



24 charged

About forty people were arrested. Twenty-four were charged. Judgment on 6 April 1927.



78 names

Members of the Central Legislature who signed a plea to the Viceroy. It was refused.



4 hangings

Lahiri on 17 December 1927. Bismil, Roshan Singh and Ashfaqulla Khan on the 19th.



4 jails

Gonda, Gorakhpur, Allahabad, Faizabad.

Figures come from the chapters in this book. Where sources differ, the chapters show both.

ACT ONE

The Plan

Shahjahanpur, 8 August 1925

On 8 August 1925, in Shahjahanpur, the members of a secret group met to decide whether to rob a train. The group was called the Hindustan Republican Association, the HRA. It wanted to drive the British out of India by force, and it had almost no money. Guns cost money. Leaflets cost money. Even travelling from town to town cost money.

Before we watch that meeting, we need to know who was in the room. Two of the men were poets from the same town, one a Hindu and one a Muslim. One was the leader. The other argued against the plan.



The poet who signed himself Bismil

He wrote poems, translated books and ran a secret revolutionary group. In the last days before his execution, he was still writing. This is the life of Ram Prasad Bismil.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the young Ram Prasad writing, years before the jail. It is not a photograph.

In December 1927, a prisoner in Gorakhpur jail was writing as fast as he could. He was writing the story of his own life. He knew he did not have long. In a few days, he was going to be hanged.

His name was Ram Prasad. But on his poems he signed another name: Bismil.

A boy in Shahjahanpur

Ram Prasad was born on 11 June 1897, in Shahjahanpur, a town in what is now Uttar Pradesh. His father was Muralidhar and his mother was Moolmati.

His father taught him Hindi at home. For Urdu, he was sent to a maulvi, a Muslim teacher. Later he joined an English school, even though his father did not like the idea. So by the time he was a teenager, he could read in three languages.

❏ **Maulvi:** a Muslim scholar and teacher. In those days, many children in north India learned Urdu from one.

He was not always a good student. One account says he fell in with bad company and read cheap novels instead of studying.

Then he found the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement. He began going to its temple in Shahjahanpur every day. There he met a holy man named Swami Somdev, who taught him about religion, and also about politics.

❏ **Pen name:** a name a writer uses instead of their real one. Ram Prasad used three: Ram, Agyat ("unknown") and Bismil. Bismil means "wounded".

A vow

When Ram Prasad was about 18, he read some news that made him furious. Bhai Parmanand, a friend of Swami Somdev, had been sentenced to death by the British.

Ram Prasad wrote a poem in Hindi called Mera Janm, "My Birth". In it he promised to fight British rule. He also made a vow to take revenge.

According to the book Hanged for Patriotism, Swami Somdev gave him a warning: "It is easy to take a vow but hard to keep it."

Books, leaflets and a river

Ram Prasad kept his vow. With Swami Somdev's help, he published a Hindi book about how America won its freedom from Britain. The government banned it.

He started a secret group called Matrivedi. He joined hands with a schoolteacher named Genda Lal Dixit, who had his own group. Together they gathered young men from towns like Etawah, Mainpuri, Agra and Shahjahanpur.

On 28 January 1918, Ram Prasad printed a leaflet called "A Message to Countrymen", with his poem "The Vow of Mainpuri". To raise money for the group, they also carried out robberies.

The police hunted them. One later account says that during a gunfight, Ram Prasad jumped into the river Yamuna and swam away underwater. The police thought he had drowned.

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Is it true?: The river escape comes from later retellings. No police report of it has been found, so we cannot be sure exactly how it happened.

The case became known as the Mainpuri Conspiracy. In November 1919, a magistrate declared Ram Prasad an absconder: a wanted man who could not be found. He hid for a long time. In February 1920, after the prisoners in the case were set free, he came home to Shahjahanpur.

Writer and organiser

Ram Prasad went on writing. He wrote poems and translated books from Bengali and English into Hindi.

He also went on planning. In 1923, in Allahabad, he helped write the rules for a new secret party, together with Sachindra Nath Sanyal and others. In October 1924, at a meeting in Cawnpore, the party was named the Hindustan Republican Association, or HRA. Ram Prasad was put in charge of its weapons.

He also found a close friend in a younger poet from Shahjahanpur, Ashfaqulla Khan. One was a Hindu who prayed at the Arya Samaj, the other a Muslim. Their friendship lasted until their deaths.

Kakori

The HRA needed money. On 9 August 1925, near Kakori, about eight miles from Lucknow, Ram Prasad and his companions stopped a train by pulling the alarm cord. They broke open the government's safe in the guard's van and took the money.

Something went wrong. A passenger, a lawyer named Ahmad Ali, stepped out of the train. He was shot dead.

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Who fired?: The court history says only that Ahmad Ali was shot after leaving the carriage. Wikipedia says the shot was fired by accident by Manmathnath Gupta.

The police arrested about forty people. The trial began in May 1926. On 6 April 1927, the judge sentenced Ram Prasad, Rajendra Lahiri and Roshan Singh to death. Ashfaqulla, tried separately, was sentenced to death too.

Appeals were made, even to London. They failed.

The last pages

In his cell in Gorakhpur jail, Ram Prasad wrote his autobiography. The book Hanged for Patriotism says he wrote the last pages on 17 December 1927, and that they were smuggled out of the jail.

On 18 December, his mother came to see him. A later retelling says she told him she was proud of him, and he asked for her blessing. Nobody wrote down their exact words at the time.

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Remembered, not recorded: what Bismil and his mother said comes from books written many years later.

On the morning of 19 December 1927, Ram Prasad Bismil was hanged in Gorakhpur jail. He was 30 years old. Ashfaqulla Khan was hanged the same day, in Faizabad. Roshan Singh was hanged at Naini jail in Allahabad. Rajendra Lahiri had been hanged two days earlier, in Gonda.

One book says he walked to the gallows calling out "Vande Mataram" and "Bharat Mata ki Jai".

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Last words: different accounts give different last words. All of them were written down later. No record from that morning has been found.

His body was cremated beside the river Rapti.

What he left behind

His autobiography was printed after his death. The British police made their own rough English translation, for officers to read in secret.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: Wikipedia says the editor Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi printed it in 1928. Hanged for Patriotism says it came out in 1929 and was banned at once.

Today, a railway station near Shahjahanpur carries his name. So does a memorial in his home town.

Why it matters

Ram Prasad Bismil is remembered as a revolutionary. But he was also a reader, a translator and a poet. He wanted India to be free, and he believed in fighting for it with weapons.

Not everyone in the freedom struggle agreed with that way. And on that August evening at Kakori, an ordinary traveller lost his life. Both things are part of his story.

Many people today call the famous song Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna "Bismil's song". As another story here explains, it was written by a different poet who used the same pen name. Ram Prasad Bismil wrote plenty of poems of his own. The last thing he wrote was his own story.

Talk about it

1. Bismil wrote poems, translated books and ran a secret group. Which of these surprises you most, and why?
2. The story says the river escape comes from later retellings and has no police report. How should a historian treat a story like that?

Ram and Ashfaq

One was a Hindu who prayed at an Arya Samaj temple. The other was a Muslim from a Pathan family. They wrote poems together, ate from the same plate, and gave their lives on the same day.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

Shahjahanpur is an old town in Uttar Pradesh. A hundred years ago, two young men lived there who would become one of the most famous pairs of friends in Indian history.

One was Ram Prasad. He wrote poems under the name Bismil. He was a Hindu, and a member of the Arya Samaj.

The other was Ashfaqulla Khan. He was a Muslim, from a Pathan family. He wrote poems too, in Urdu.

People often say that India's freedom was won by Hindus and Muslims together. The story of these two friends shows what that looked like.



Ashfaqulla Khan, in an undated photograph from the 1920s.
Unknown photographer, public domain. [Where this picture comes from](#)

The youngest son

Ashfaqulla Khan was born on 22 October 1900, in Shahjahanpur. He was the youngest child in his family. His father, Shafiq Ullah, was a landowner. His family had a long tradition of military service.

As a boy, Ashfaq went to a school in the town, the Abbie Rich Mission High School.

Stories from a big brother

Ashfaq had an elder brother named Riyasat. Riyasat had been in the same class as Ram Prasad Bismil.

By then, Bismil was already famous in Shahjahanpur. He had been part of a secret plot against the British, and had been on the run. Riyasat often told his little brother about Bismil's courage. He told him about Bismil's Urdu poems too.

Ashfaq was fascinated. He wanted to meet this man.

How they met

At first, Bismil was not interested in the young boy who kept trying to meet him. He simply ignored him.

Then, during the Non-Cooperation Movement, Bismil spoke at public meetings in Shahjahanpur. At one of them, Ashfaq walked up and introduced himself. He said he was the younger brother of Bismil's old classmate. He said he wrote poems too.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: one book says they first met at school, when Ashfaq was in Class 8 and Bismil in Class 9. A memorial trust in Faizabad says they met at a public meeting in 1922. Both are later accounts, and we cannot be sure which is right.



Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaq's closest friend.

Unknown photographer, public domain. [Where this picture comes from](#)

Poets together

Ashfaq wrote his poems under pen names. One account gives them as Warsi and Hasrat. Another spells them Varsi and Hazrat.

When Bismil heard Ashfaq's couplets, he was impressed. The two became close friends. Bismil often helped polish Ashfaq's poems. At poetry gatherings called mushairas, people loved hearing the two of them.

📖 **Mushaira:** a gathering where poets read out their poems, usually in Urdu, to a live audience.

One plate, one name

One of their biographers tells a lovely story about them.

In those days, many Hindus and Muslims would not eat from the same plate. These two did. They ate their meals from the same dish. And Ashfaq gave his friend a special name. He called him simply "Ram".

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

A story told later: this detail comes from a biography written many years afterwards. We have no letter or diary from the time that proves it. But it shows how people remember their friendship.

A school and a choice

In 1920 and 1921, Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement swept across India. Ashfaq joined it. One account says his headmaster expelled him from school for it.

In 1921, both friends went to the Congress meeting in Ahmedabad.

But in February 1922, Gandhi called off the movement. Many young men felt let down. Bismil and Ashfaq decided to take a different, more dangerous path.

The secret group

In 1924, a secret group was set up, the Hindustan Republican Association, or HRA. Bismil became one of its leaders. Ashfaq joined too. The group wanted to drive the British out of India by force.

To buy weapons, they needed money. So they planned to rob a train carrying government money.

At first, Ashfaq argued against the plan. He thought it was too risky. But once the group decided, he stood by his friends.

Kakori

On the evening of 9 August 1925, near a village called Kakori close to Lucknow, the group stopped a train. They broke open the safe in the guard's van and took the money.

During the robbery, a passenger named Ahmad Ali was shot dead by mistake. The young men had not meant to kill anyone. But now the British would hunt them without mercy.

Ashfaq was there that night. He handed his own pistol, a Mauser, to another member of the group, Manmath Nath Gupta.

Within three months, Bismil was arrested. Ashfaq escaped. He stayed on the run for more than a year.

Apart

For more than a year, the two friends were apart. Bismil was in jail in Lucknow, on trial with the rest of the group. Ashfaq was hiding. For a while, he even worked as a clerk in a faraway town, under a false name.

Then, in Delhi, a man he trusted gave him away to the police. Ashfaq was arrested.

The police wanted him to give evidence against Bismil and the others. If he did, he might save his own life. Ashfaq refused.

The main trial went on for more than a year. In April 1927, the judge sentenced Bismil and two others to death. By then, the main trial was over. So Ashfaq was tried separately, with one other member of the group, Sachindra Nath Bakshi. Bakshi was sentenced to prison for life. Ashfaq was given the same sentence as his friend Bismil. Death.

Two prisons, one day

The friends appealed. In August 1927, judges in Lucknow heard the appeals. They did not change the sentences.

On 19 December 1927, Ram Prasad Bismil was hanged in Gorakhpur jail.

On the very same day, in another town, Ashfaqulla Khan was hanged in Faizabad jail.

Bismil was 30. Ashfaq was 27.

Why they are remembered together

Today, schools, roads and parks are named after these two men. Their story has been told in films and television series too. In the 2006 film Rang De Basanti, the actor Kunal Kapoor played Ashfaqulla Khan. And very often, their names are said together: Bismil and Ashfaq.

They came from different religions. They prayed in different ways. But they shared their poems, their plates, their dreams, and in the end, their fate.

When people want to show what friendship across faiths can mean, they still tell the story of Ram and Ashfaq.

Talk about it

1. The plate-sharing story comes from a biography written long after. Why does the book still tell it, and what does it say about how it is told?
2. Ashfaq refused to give evidence against his friends. What might he have been thinking?

The man who said no to Kakori

When his friends planned to rob a government train, Ashfaqulla Khan argued against it. Then they voted, and he went with them anyway.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

In the summer of 1925, a secret group of young revolutionaries had a problem. They wanted to fight the British. But they had almost no money.

Guns cost money. Printing leaflets cost money. Even travelling from town to town cost money.

The group was called the Hindustan Republican Association, or HRA. Its leader was Ram Prasad Bismil.

A daring idea

Bismil had noticed something. Trains carried money collected by the British government from one town to another. The money was kept in a safe in the guard's van.

What if they stopped one of those trains, and took the money? It was India's money, they said, collected by the British from Indian people.

On 8 August 1925, the group met in Shahjahanpur to decide.

The voice against

One member was not happy. It was Ashfaqulla Khan, Bismil's closest friend.

Ashfaq argued against the plan. We do not know all his reasons. But it is easy to see the danger. A train robbery would bring the whole might of the British police down on their small group.

Standing by his friends

The group did not change its mind. The plan would go ahead.

Ashfaq now had to choose. He could walk away. Or he could stay with his friends, even though he had argued against the plan.

He chose to stay.

📌 **Loyalty**: being faithful to your friends, even when things are hard. It does not always mean agreeing with them.

The night of 9 August

The very next evening, 9 August 1925, the plan was carried out. The train was stopped near a station called Kakori, not far from Lucknow. The group broke open the safe in the guard's van and took the money bags.

Ashfaq handed his pistol, a Mauser, to another member of the group, Manmath Nath Gupta.

Then something went terribly wrong. A passenger named Ahmad Ali, a lawyer, had stepped down from the train. A shot was fired, and he was killed. Most accounts say the shot came from Manmath Nath Gupta.

Nobody had planned for anyone to die. But it had happened.

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

How much money? Old records do not agree. A court history gives a little over 4,553 rupees. Other accounts give about 4,600, or even 8,000.

He had been right

Ashfaq's fears came true. The British police hunted the group down. Within two years, Ashfaq, Bismil and two others had been hanged. Many more went to prison for years.

Ashfaq had said no. Then he had gone along anyway, because his friends were going.

Was that right? People still argue about it. But nobody has ever doubted his courage, or his loyalty.

Talk about it

1. Ashfaq argued against the plan and then went along. Is that loyalty or something else? Explain your view.
2. What did the group hope to get from robbing a train?

ACT TWO

The Night

Near Kakori, 9 August 1925

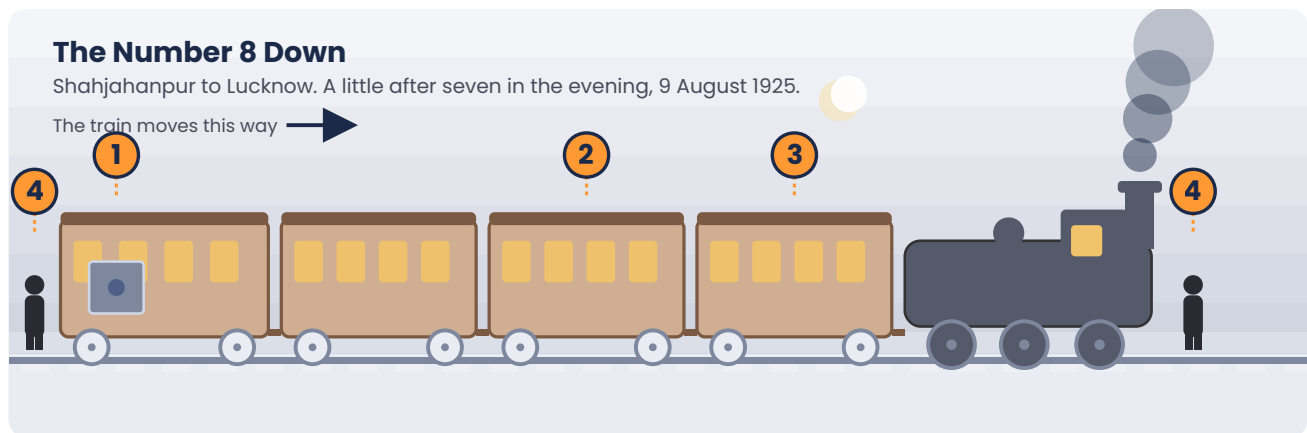
Now the same few minutes, seen from different seats. A student in a second-class carriage. A passenger who stepped down from his carriage. A nineteen-year-old who would never be caught. And a schoolteacher who, according to two of our sources, was not on the train at all.

You will meet the same night more than once. The details are not always the same from one telling to the next. Where they differ, the chapters say so, in a blue box marked “Where the sources differ”.



Inside the Number 8 Down

A drawing, not a photograph. It shows only what the chapters say.



1 The guard's van

The government's money travels in a metal safe in the guard's van. The men break it open with a hammer.

2 A second-class compartment

One National Book Trust book says Lahiri, Ashfaqulla and Bakshi got down from a second-class compartment.

3 The passengers

They are told to stay inside and that no harm will come to them. Ahmad Ali, a lawyer, steps out and is killed.

4 The two ends of the train

In one book's telling, two men stand at the two ends and fire shots.

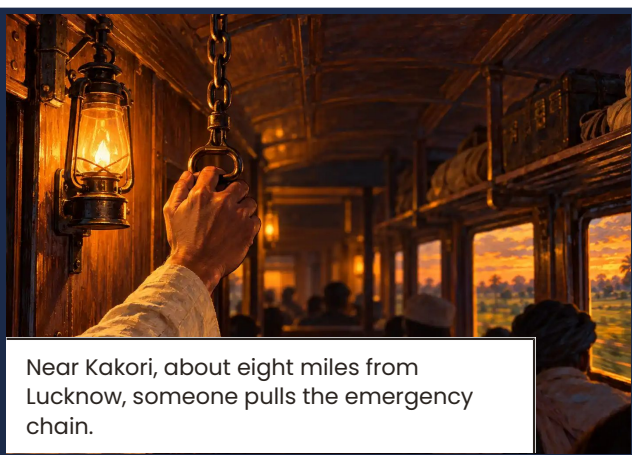
Use this picture as a guide while you read. When the chapters disagree about who was where, the picture does not choose. It shows the guard's van, a second-class compartment, the passengers and the two ends of the train, and nothing more.

WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

What the picture cannot show: how many carriages there were, which one each man was in, and who stood at the two ends. No source we opened gives this, so the drawing does not guess.

Stay inside

9 August 1925. The Number 8 Down runs from Shahjahanpur towards Lucknow.



Near Kakori, about eight miles from Lucknow, someone pulls the emergency chain.

The train stops. In one book's telling, two men stand at the two ends of it and fire shots.

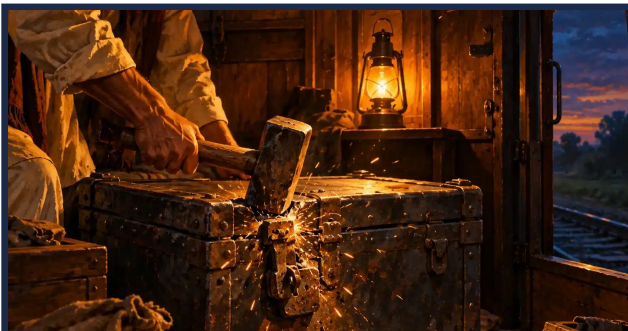


"Travellers! Do not be afraid."

Words as one book gives them



The two books word the warning differently. Both say passengers were told to stay inside.



Some of the men climb into the guard's van and break open a metal box with a hammer.



In a few minutes, the box is open. But one passenger has not stayed inside.

The chain at Kakori

A student of history sat in a second-class carriage on 9 August 1925. At Kakori, someone pulled the chain.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

What happens when someone pulls the emergency chain on a train?

The train slows and stops. Passengers wonder why. On the evening of 9 August 1925, near the small station of Kakori, the stop was planned.

The train was the Number Eight Down, going from Shahjahanpur to Lucknow. It was after seven in the evening. The place was about eight miles from Lucknow.

The man in the carriage

Rajendranath Lahiri was a student. The Wire says he was working towards an M.A. in history at Banaras Hindu University. He was also honorary secretary of a Bengali literary society, and he wrote for Bengali magazines.

He belonged to the Hindustan Republican Association, or HRA. This secret group wanted to end British rule. It needed money.

The plan was to take the government's cash from the train. The book says Lahiri, Ashfaqulla Khan and Sachindranath Bakshi got down from a second-class compartment when the train stopped. The Wire says Lahiri is said to have pulled the chain.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: The Wire and Wikipedia say Lahiri was born in 1901. The National Book Trust book says 1892. The Wire also says Kakori was in 1927, but its own dates show that 1925 is right. We have not seen a birth record.

What the book says happened

The guard had climbed down to find out who pulled the chain. According to the book, two men took hold of him and made him lie on his face. Two others pushed the driver down from the engine.

Two more men stood at the two ends of the train and fired shots. The book says they shouted a message to the passengers: "Travellers! Do not be afraid."

The High Court's history says they told passengers to stay inside. It adds that their property would not be touched, because the men wanted only the government's money.

Then some of them climbed into the guard's van. They broke open a strong metal box with a hammer. In a few minutes they had the cash.

The man who left his carriage

One passenger did not stay inside. His name was Ahmad Ali, and he was a lawyer.

The High Court's history says he got out of his carriage even though he had been warned. He was shot and died.

The men had told the passengers that they would be safe. But a man was killed that night.

The trial

Police arrested many people across the country. The hearing began in January 1926, in a building in Lucknow called the Ring Theatre.

The judge was Mr. Hamilton, a Special Judge. He gave his judgment on 6 April 1927.

Hamilton called him "one of the leaders of this conspiracy". He said that, as a leader, Lahiri was also responsible for the death of Ahmad Ali. Lahiri was sentenced to death.

📖 **Conspiracy:** a secret plan, made by a group of people, to do something against the law.

We have not read the original judgment. We are using the words that the book prints.

Why it matters

There were people in India who did not agree with the HRA's way. Gandhi wanted freedom to be won without violence.



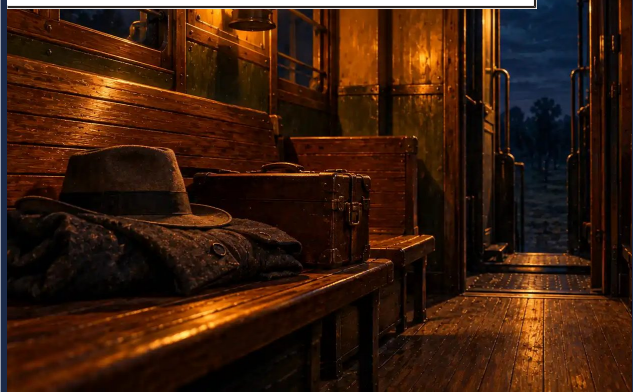
The story of the chain at Kakori is about courage and risk. It is also about a lawyer who was travelling on that train. Both parts belong in the telling.

Talk about it

1. Passengers were told to stay inside and promised they were safe. Why do you think the group wanted to say that?
2. The story says the book names Lahiri as a leader. How does the judge's view change what happens to him?

The passenger

Among the passengers is a lawyer named Ahmad Ali. The men on the train have told everyone to stay inside.



He steps out of his carriage, even though he has been warned.



He is shot, and dies.

WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Who fired?

The court history does not say whose bullet it was.

English Wikipedia says it was Manmathnath Gupta, by accident.

A newspaper report calls it an accidental shot.



The men had promised that no traveller would be harmed. But a man was killed that night. Both parts belong in the telling.

Pictures made with AI to show the scene. They are not photographs. The captions and words come from the chapter "The passenger who stepped off the train". No face has been invented.

The passenger who stepped off the train

The men at Kakori said they would not harm any traveller. But one passenger, a lawyer named Ahmad Ali, was shot. Here is what the sources say about that night, and what the court made of it.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

Stories about Kakori often say that the robbers meant no harm to any passenger. That was their plan. It was not what happened.

On the evening of 9 August 1925, a train called the 8 Down stopped near Kakori. One passenger got off. He was a lawyer. His name was Ahmad Ali. He was shot and killed.

The warning

The men on the train told the passengers to stay inside, says the court history. They said no harm would come to them, because they were only after "Government property".

They shouted, in words one book gives: "Travellers! Do not be afraid. We are revolutionaries fighting for the freedom. Your lives, money and honour are safe. But take care not to peep out of the train."

This warning was part of the plan. The group wanted to rob the government's money and leave ordinary people alone.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: the two books give the warning in different words. We do not know the exact words. Both say that passengers were told to stay inside the train.

What happened

Ahmad Ali left his carriage, even though he had been warned. Then he was shot, says the court history.

The bullet came from the pistol of Manmathnath Gupta, one of the young men, according to English Wikipedia. The Hindi account tells it in more detail. Someone handed Gupta a Mauser pistol so that his friend could use both hands to break open the safe with a hammer. Gupta then fired a shot, out of excitement and haste, and the bullet hit Ahmad Ali. He died on the spot.

So the shot was not meant for a passenger. The court history does not say whose bullet it was. It only says that he was shot.

The law's answer

Ahmad Ali's death changed the case. A robbery was now a case with a killing in it.

The judge said that Rajendra Lahiri was one of two main leaders of the plot, and so he was also "responsible for the death of Ahmed Ali". The National Book Trust book prints these words. Lahiri was sentenced to death.

Manmathnath Gupta, the man who fired the shot, was sentenced to fourteen years in prison, English Wikipedia says.

That is a hard difference to understand. The man named as the one who fired got fourteen years. Lahiri, who was named as a leader, was sentenced to die. The sources we have do not explain why the sentences differed so much.

What we do not know

We know little about Ahmad Ali himself. The two sources that name him say only that he was a lawyer, and that he was a passenger on that train.

Why it matters

When we remember Kakori, we remember the daring of the young men and the pain of their end. But Ahmad Ali also lost his life that night.

A good story about the past can hold both. It does not praise the shooting, and it does not pretend the death never happened.

Talk about it

1. Ahmad Ali was warned and still got down. What might that tell us about what he was thinking or doing?
2. The man named as the one who fired got fourteen years; Lahiri, named as a leader, was sentenced to die. Does that seem fair? What do you need to know to decide?

The one who got away from Kakori

Ten young men stopped a train near Lucknow and took the government's money. Within months, almost all of them were caught. One was never found.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

On 9 August 1925, a train was chugging towards Lucknow. It was the Number 8 Down, coming from Shahjahanpur.

Near a village called Kakori, somebody pulled the emergency chain. The train screeched to a stop.

The man said to have pulled it was Rajendra Lahiri. And he was not alone.

Why stop a train?

Lahiri belonged to a secret group called the Hindustan Republican Association, or HRA. Its leader was Ram Prasad Bismil. The group wanted to drive the British out of India by force.

To do that, they needed money. They needed it to buy weapons and print leaflets.

Bismil knew that this train carried money bags in the guard's van. The money had been collected by the British government. So, the group thought, it was really India's money. They decided to take it.

The robbery

About ten young men took part. One of them was nineteen years old. His name was Chandrashekhar Azad.

The men went to the guard's van. They broke open the money box. By one count, they took about 8,000 rupees.

Then something went wrong. A passenger, a lawyer named Ahmad Ali, had stepped down from the train. A shot was fired by mistake, and he was killed. The revolutionaries had not planned to hurt anyone. But now a man was dead.

📖 **HRA:** the Hindustan Republican Association, a secret group set up in 1924. In 1928 it became the HSRA, with Azad as its leader.

The great hunt

The British were furious. This was not just a robbery. It was a challenge to their rule.

The police began a huge search. On 26 September 1925, they arrested many members of the group in one sweep. Bismil was caught at Shahjahanpur. Ashfaqulla Khan escaped for more than a year, but he was caught in Delhi in December 1926.

The trial went on for a long time. In 1927, four men were sentenced to death: Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Rajendra Lahiri and Roshan Singh. All four were hanged in December 1927.

The empty chair

But one name was missing from the courtroom.

Chandrashekhar Azad had slipped away. He was one of the very few in the group who were never arrested.

How did he do it? He moved quietly from place to place. He changed his name and his clothes. For a long time he hid near Jhansi, dressed as a holy man.

The police kept searching. Still nobody caught him.

What came next

Azad was now one of the last free leaders of the group. He did not give up. In 1928 he helped to build the group again, with young new members. One of them was Bhagat Singh.

The friends who were hanged for Kakori never saw their dream come true. But the one who got away carried it forward.

Talk about it

1. Azad was never caught. What do you think made it possible, according to the story?
2. This chapter says the friends who were hanged never saw their dream come true, but the one who got away carried it on. What does that mean?

In the case, but not on the train

Roshan Singh was sentenced to death in the Kakori case. But the books say he was not at Kakori.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

Roshan Singh's name is tied to Kakori. Yet two of our sources say he was not at the train that night.

How can a man be sentenced to death in the Kakori case and not have been at Kakori?

A case bigger than a train

Most of us know the Kakori case as the story of one train, stopped on 9 August 1925. But the court in Lucknow looked at more than that.

The Allahabad High Court's history lists four robberies that were brought into the case.

- **Bamrauli**, on 25 December 1924. The history says a wrestler who stood up to the robbers was shot dead.
- **Bichpuri**, on 9 March 1925. One person was killed.
- **Dwarkapur**, on 25 May 1925. A villager lost his life.
- **Kakori**, on 9 August 1925.

📖 **Robbery**: here, a group of men attacking a place or a train to steal money. The old word for it was "dacoity".

So the Kakori case was about all four. It was named for the last, because that one became the most famous.

What the books say about Roshan Singh

Roshan Singh was not even present at the "main scene" of the Kakori robbery. He did not take part in it.

He was arrested and tried in January 1926 for a murder committed during the Bamrauli robbery.

Judge Hamilton's words are printed in the National Book Trust book. They say that at Bamrauli Roshan "was the leader, as he knew everything about that village". They also say that "two persons have revealed that he was carrying a pistol that day".

Because of this, the judge sentenced him to death under Section 396 of the law. Judge Hamilton gave his judgment on 6 April 1927.

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two things to keep apart: Roshan Singh was sentenced for what the judge said happened at Bamrauli. That is different from being on the train at Kakori. We have not read the judgment or the witnesses' statements. We use the words the book prints.

A death at Bamrauli

At Bamrauli, a man was killed. We should say it plainly. The sentence was for that death.

The book says many people felt Roshan Singh's sentence was too harsh. It says he was the oldest of the accused and that his part was the smallest. This is the opinion of the book's writer.

We do not have a way to check this. Courts, the writer and other people could see the same events differently.

The end

Roshan Singh was hanged on 19 December 1927 in Allahabad jail. The National Book Trust book and Wikipedia agree on this.

Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqulla Khan were hanged on the same day, in other jails.

Why it matters

A name like "the Kakori case" is a short label. It can hide how many events lay inside.

When we read about a person, it is worth asking two questions. What was he charged with? And what do the records show?

Talk about it

1. How can a man be sentenced in the Kakori case and not have been at Kakori?
2. The story asks two questions to ask about any person in history. What are they?

Before the train: three robberies that went wrong

Kakori was not the first robbery in the case. Three earlier ones, on village houses, cost three lives and brought in little money. After them, the group changed its plan.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

The Kakori train action took place on 9 August 1925. Most people know that day. Fewer people know that it was the fourth robbery in the case, not the first.

The court called the whole case the Kakori train dacoity and conspiracy case. The judges looked at four robberies together. Three of them happened before the train. All three were at the homes of rich people in villages. Each one ended with a person killed.

📖 **Dacoity:** a robbery by a gang. In the old law, a dacoity in which someone is killed was punished very hard.

The three houses

The Allahabad High Court's history lists them like this.

Bamrauli. This happened on Christmas night, 25 December 1924, in the district of Pilibhit. The house belonged to a rich moneylender, who also owned a sugar factory. A wrestler stood up to the robbers. He was shot dead.

Bichpuri. This was also in Pilibhit. The court history gives the date as 9 March 1925. The house belonged to a rich man. One person was killed.

Dwarkapur. This was in the Pratapgarh district. The court history gives the date as 25 May 1925. The house belonged to a rich man. A villager lost his life.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: The dates do not match everywhere. The Hindi account says Bichpuri was on 7 March, and Dwarkapur on 24 May. English Wikipedia says Dwarikapur was on 24 May, and gives 25 December 1924 for Bamrauli. We use the court history. The days are very close, but we cannot say which are exact.

What the group learned

The Hindi account says that Bichpuri and Dwarkapur each brought in very little money, and that each cost a life.

It says that after these two robberies, Ram Prasad Bismil decided something. From now on, the group would loot only government money. They would not take the property of rich Indians again.

Bismil gave a similar reason in his own voice. He told his friends that if they robbed the government, they would not have to harm their own people.

That is why the next target was a train. The government's money was carried in an iron safe in the guard's van.

Who was at Bamrauli?

The courts treated these four robberies as one case. This matters for one of the men who was hanged.

Thakur Roshan Singh was not on the train at Kakori. English Wikipedia says he did not take part in it. The National Book Trust book says so too. He was tried for what happened at Bamrauli. The book prints words it says come from the judge. They say Roshan Singh led the Bamrauli robbery, because he knew the village well, and that two people had said he carried a pistol that day.

So Roshan Singh was sentenced to death for the earlier robbery, where a man had died. He was not sentenced for the train.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Not settled: One government book, the Dictionary of Martyrs, is reported to describe Roshan Singh as part of the train action. We could not open that book. Wikipedia and the National Book Trust book say he was not there. We follow those two, and we say so openly.

Why it matters

Kakori is remembered as a daring plan with a clean aim. The court record shows a harder picture. Before the train, there were three robberies at village homes. Three people died.

It is right to remember the young men's love for their country. It is also right to remember the three villagers. A story told fairly keeps both in view.

Talk about it

1. Three villagers died in the robberies before the train. Why is it right to remember them too?
2. What did Bismil decide after Bichpuri and Dwarkapur?

ACT THREE

The Hunt

Kakori, Lucknow and across northern India, 1925 to 1927

Two days later, a police report was written by hand, in Urdu. It said that twenty to twenty-five unknown men had robbed a train. There were in fact about ten. The police did not yet know their names.

In September 1925 the arrests began. A large trial followed in Lucknow, and a second one for the man who had got away for more than a year.



A page in Urdu

11 August 1925. Two days later, the robbery is reported at Kakori police station.



In 1925, police reports here were written in Urdu. Later, someone translated it into Hindi and attached the translation.



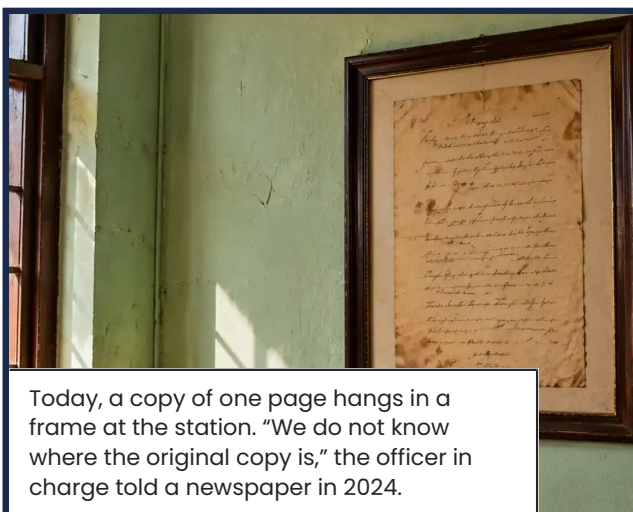
What the report said

20 to 25 unknown men

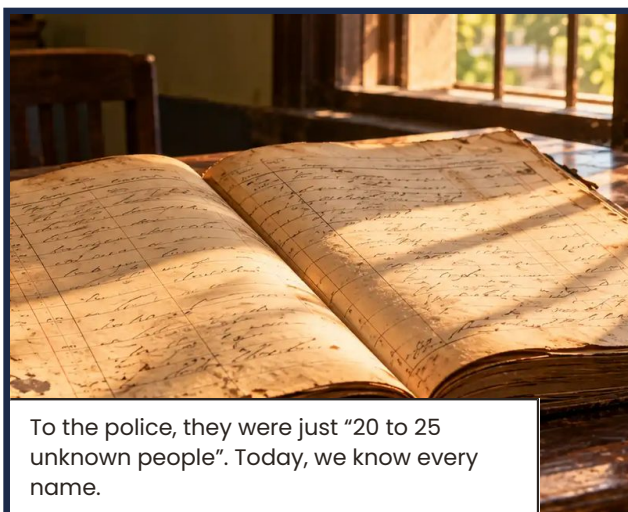


What the records show

about ten



Today, a copy of one page hangs in a frame at the station. "We do not know where the original copy is," the officer in charge told a newspaper in 2024.



To the police, they were just "20 to 25 unknown people". Today, we know every name.

Pictures made with AI to show the scene. They are not photographs. The captions and words come from the chapter "The police complaint written in Urdu". No face has been invented.

Kakori police station · reported 11 August 1925 · written in Urdu · later translated into Hindi

CHAPTER 9 · THE POLICE · 11 AUGUST 1925, AND TODAY

The police complaint written in Urdu

Two days after the Kakori train robbery, a police report was written by hand, in Urdu. Almost a hundred years later, one faded page of it still hangs in a frame at the Kakori police station.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

In a small police station near Lucknow, there is a photo frame on the wall. Inside it is not a photograph. It is a page of old paper, yellow and faded.

It is part of a police report. It was written almost a hundred years ago, about one of the most famous robberies in India's history.

What happened at Kakori

On the evening of 9 August 1925, a train called the Number 8 Down was on its way to Lucknow. It was carrying money that belonged to the British government.

Near a village called Kakori, someone pulled the emergency chain. The train stopped. A group of young revolutionaries took the government's money bags from the guard's carriage.

The leader was Ram Prasad Bismil. With him were nine others, among them Ashfaqulla Khan, Rajendra Lahiri and a young Chandrashekhar Azad.

The robbery did not go exactly as planned. A passenger named Ahmad Ali had stepped down from the train. He was hit by a gunshot and died.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: the Hindustan Times report calls it an accidental shot. Wikipedia says the bullet was fired by one of the young men, Manmathnath Gupta.

The report

Two days later, on 11 August 1925, the robbery was reported at the Kakori police station. The report came from the government, through an officer of the railways.

📄 **FIR:** First Information Report. It is the first written report the police make about a crime.

In 1925, police reports in this part of India were written in Urdu. So this one was too. Later, someone translated it into Hindi and attached the translation to it.

What the report says

Parts of the report have faded so much that they cannot be read. Even the number of the report is lost. But the Hindi translation gives every detail that could still be read.

It says that 20 to 25 unknown people robbed the train. In fact, there were only about ten. The police did not yet know who they were.

The news of the robbery was first sent to the police from the moving train itself, through a machine for sending messages that was fitted in it.

The crime is listed under Section 396 of the Indian Penal Code. That is the law for "dacoity with murder": a robbery by a gang of five or more people, in which someone is killed.

And the report gives the amount of money stolen, very exactly: 4,601 rupees, 15 annas and 6 pies.

📄 **Annas and pies:** in those days a rupee was divided into 16 annas, and each anna into 12 pies. So 15 annas and 6 pies was nearly one more rupee.

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

How much money?: The report says 4,601 rupees, 15 annas and 6 pies. The Allahabad High Court's history of the case gives 4,553 rupees, 3 annas and 6 pies. Wikipedia gives a much bigger figure, about 8,000 rupees. None of them explains the difference.

Found in an old register

A few years ago, a reporter from the Hindustan Times asked to see the report. The police at Kakori searched through old files for hours. At last they found the register for 1925. It was in bad shape. Its pages were torn and yellow, and the Urdu writing was fading.

Inside was the report of the train robbery, with its Hindi translation.

Today, a copy of one page hangs in a frame at the police station. "It is not a complete copy, only one page has been preserved," the officer in charge told the newspaper in 2024. "We do not know where the original copy is."

The Kakori police station itself is older than the robbery. It opened in 1903.

What happened next

The report does not say how the case ended. About forty people were arrested. After a long trial, four men were sentenced to death: Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Rajendra Lahiri and Roshan Singh. Many others were sent to prison.

Why it matters

The report was written by people who saw a crime and did not yet know the names behind it. To them, it was just "20 to 25 unknown people".

Today, we know every one of their names, and India remembers them as freedom fighters. A single faded page in Urdu reminds us how it all began: as an ordinary police case, on an ordinary page, in a small station near Lucknow.

Talk about it

1. Why was the first police report written in Urdu?
2. The report says 20 to 25 unknown robbers. There were about ten. What does that tell you about early police reports?

The clerk from Mathura

After the Kakori robbery, every other member of the group was caught. Ashfaqulla Khan hid in a sugarcane field, changed his name, and got a job in an office. Then he trusted the wrong friend.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

After the Kakori train robbery in August 1925, the British police hunted for the young men who did it.

In September 1925, they arrested many of them in one sweep. In October, they caught the leader, Ram Prasad Bismil, in Shahjahanpur.

But one man from Shahjahanpur slipped through their fingers. It was Bismil's closest friend, Ashfaqulla Khan.

The sugarcane field

At first, Ashfaq did not go far. He hid in a sugarcane field, about half a mile from his home.

Sugarcane grows taller than a man. A person can hide in a thick field and not be seen from the road.

The police were all over the town. So his friends could not visit him in daylight. They sent him food only at night.

A new name, a new job

Ashfaq knew he could not stay hidden in a field for ever. He had to get far away.

He travelled east, to a town called Daltonganj, in what is now Jharkhand. There he got a job as a clerk in an engineering company.

He did not use his real name. He told people he came from a farming family in Mathura. Nobody guessed that this quiet clerk was one of the most wanted men in India.

 **Clerk:** someone who works in an office, writing letters, keeping accounts and filing papers.

The boss who loved poetry

Here a surprising thing happened. The owner of the company loved Urdu poetry, especially the short verses called shers.

Ashfaq, of course, was a poet. When his boss heard his verses, he was delighted. One biography says he even raised Ashfaq's salary.

For a while, Ashfaq lived a strange double life. By day he was a clerk from Mathura. In his heart, he was still a revolutionary.

A friend from home

After some months, Ashfaq went to Delhi. He hoped to find a way to leave India and go abroad.

In Delhi, he met a man he knew from Shahjahanpur. They were both Pathans. They had been at school together. Ashfaq trusted him, and asked for his help.

That was a mistake. The friend went to the police and told them where Ashfaq was.

The police came, and Ashfaq was arrested.

WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

When was he caught?: Most sources say Ashfaq was arrested in Delhi on 7 December 1926. One account says 17 July 1926. We cannot be sure which is right.

The one they could not break

After his arrest, the police tried hard to get Ashfaq to give evidence against his friends. That would have saved his life.

He refused.

He was tried, together with another member of the group, Sachindra Nath Bakshi. The judge sentenced Bakshi to prison for life. He sentenced Ashfaq to death.

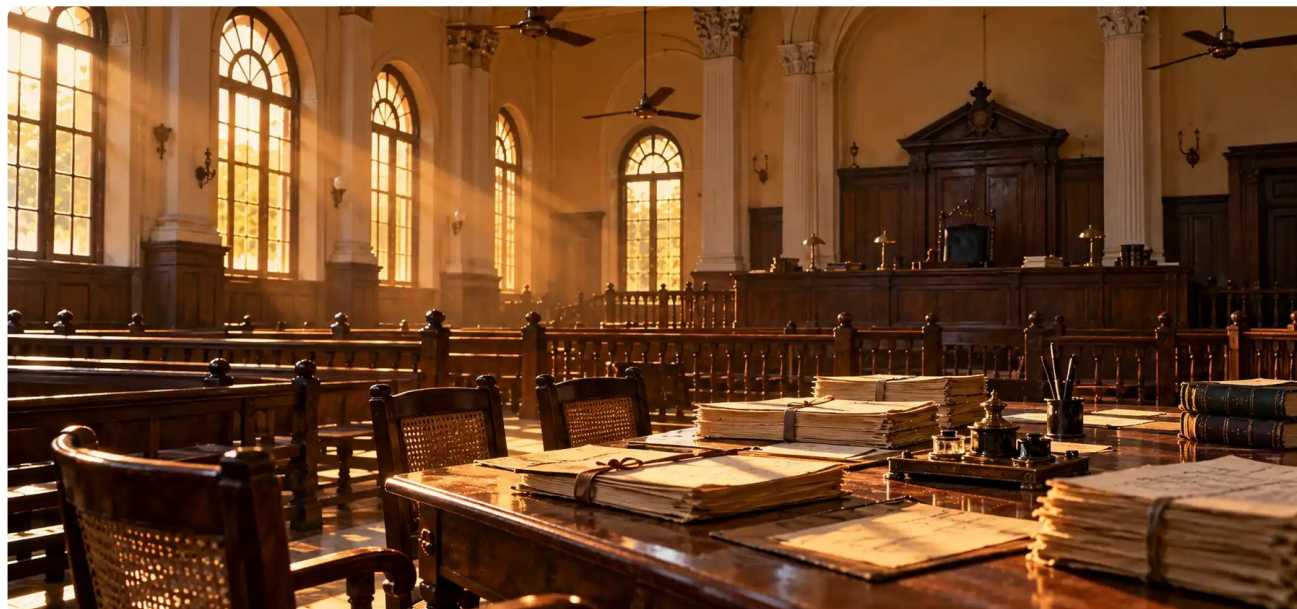
The man who had escaped for more than a year could not escape this.

Talk about it

1. Ashfaq's boss loved Urdu poetry and raised his salary. What does this tell you about the double life he led?
2. A friend from home gave him away. What would you have done in Ashfaq's place?

The long trial in Lucknow

After the Kakori train action, twenty-four people were put on trial. It took almost two years, two courts and two trials. Here is how it went, and where the old records disagree.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

On the night of 9 August 1925, a train was stopped near Kakori and a government safe was broken open. A few weeks later, the police began to arrest people all over northern India.

What happened to those people in court is a long story. It has a judge, a famous prosecutor, many lawyers, and two separate trials. It also has a lot of numbers, and the old records do not always agree on them. This story tells you what we know, and where the sources part ways.

Why the police thought it was a plot

At first, the police had a robbery to solve. Then they noticed something. The pistols and bullets found at several crime scenes looked alike. And holding up a train was very unusual.

So the police decided this was not one robbery. It was a plan. The Allahabad High Court's history of the Lucknow court says a senior detective found a large secret group. Its members were mostly young. Some were teenagers and students. Their aim, in the court's words, was to set up a "Federal Republic of the United States of India" by armed revolution.

The police also found papers. One was a leaflet against what it called official terrorism. Another was the rules and aims of the Hindustan Republican Association, the HRA.

📖 **Conspiracy:** a secret plan made by several people together. In law, you can be punished for the plan itself, even for parts you did not carry out.

The arrests

Nine men were arrested on one day, 26 September 1925. Among them was Roshan Singh. Ram Prasad Bismil was arrested at Shahjahanpur a month later, on 26 October.

Some of the men sought by the police were never caught. Chandrashekhar Azad is the best known of them.

Altogether, twenty-four people were charged. The court history says they faced two main charges. The first was plotting to end British rule. The second was taking part in robberies in which people were killed. There were four of these robberies in all. Kakori was the last.

Where, and how long?

The trial of twenty-one of the accused was held in Lucknow, before a special judge named Mr Hamilton. One of the accused was freed before the trial began. Two more, Ashfaqulla Khan and Sachindra Nath Bakshi, were still on the run. They were tried later.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: When did the trial begin? The National Book Trust book says the hearing began on 4 January 1926, in a building called the Ring Theatre. It says that building is now Lucknow's General Post Office. Wikipedia says the trial of the twenty-one began on 1 May 1926. The court history says only that the trial lasted "about 8 months". The judgment came on 6 April 1927. From 1 May 1926, that is almost eleven months. So at least one of these numbers is off.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: A Hindi account names a special judge called Ainuddin. The court history, the National Book Trust book and English Wikipedia all name Hamilton. We follow the three that agree.

The lawyers

The government hired a famous lawyer, Pandit Jagat Narain, to argue its case. The accused had far less money. The court history says two Lucknow lawyers, C. B. Gupta and H. N. Misra, took an interest in the case from start to end. They stood up for accused men who had nobody else.

C. B. Gupta later became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. English Wikipedia says other lawyers also defended the accused, among them Govind Ballabh Pant.

A Hindi account adds a few scenes from the courtroom. It says Bismil asked to argue his own case in English, but the court refused and gave him a lawyer. It says he once asked the prosecutor why he called the accused "employees" of anyone. These scenes are told in only one of our sources. We cannot say how exactly they happened.

The judgment

On 6 April 1927, Mr Hamilton gave his decision. The court history sums it up like this:

- Two men were found not guilty.
- Eighteen men were found guilty of the plot.

-
- Nine of them were also found guilty of the robberies.
 - Three were sentenced to death: Ram Prasad Bismil, Rajendra Lahiri and Roshan Singh.
 - Fifteen got prison terms of different lengths.
 - One man was found unfit to stand trial. His case was put off.

Sachindranath Sanyal was sentenced to life, and Manmathnath Gupta to fourteen years. The shortest sentences were three years.

The judgment, as one book prints it, describes two of the men. About Lahiri, the judge said that he was one of the leaders, and that he was "responsible for the death of Ahmed Ali". About Roshan Singh, the judge said he was the leader in the Bamrauli robbery, and that two people had said he carried a pistol that day.

📖 **Bamrauli:** the first of the four robberies in the case. It happened on Christmas night in 1924, in the Pilibhit district. It was not at Kakori.

The second trial

Ashfaqulla Khan was arrested in Delhi on 7 December 1926. Bakshi was caught later. Both were tried in a separate case before another judge, Mr J. R. W. Bennett. Ashfaqulla was sentenced to death. Bakshi was sentenced to be sent away for life. Ashfaqulla appealed. Bakshi did not.

This is why you may read different numbers. Three men were sentenced to death in the first trial. A fourth, Ashfaqulla, was sentenced in the second. The National Book Trust book says all four were sentenced together. The court history says otherwise. We follow the court.

The appeal

Fifteen of the convicted men appealed to the Chief Court in Lucknow. One later gave up his appeal. The government also asked the court to give six of them heavier sentences.

Two judges heard the appeal. They were the Chief Judge, Sir Louis Stuart, and Justice Raza. They agreed with the trial judge. They kept all four death sentences. They made the sentences heavier for five of the men.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Two versions: The court history gives the date of the appeal judgment as 11 August 1927. English Wikipedia and the Hindi account both say 22 August 1927. We have no court record in front of us to settle it, so we show both.

What came after

Bismil, Lahiri, Roshan Singh and Ashfaqulla were hanged in December 1927. Some of the other accused came out of jail years later and lived long lives. The court history notes that a few of them became well-known citizens of free India.

Why it matters

The Kakori trial was one of the biggest trials of its time. Lawyers, leaders and newspapers all followed it.

It is also a good lesson in reading old records. Judges, historians and writers of books each remember it a little differently. Dates move around. Names are spelled in different ways. Some details come from only one writer.

When you read history, it helps to ask: who says so, and does anyone else say the same? That is what we have tried to do here.

Talk about it

1. The chapter lists many numbers that old records give differently. Pick one and explain how you would try to settle it.
2. Why were the accused put on trial for a plot as well as for the robberies?

ACT FOUR

The Last Days

Four jails, December 1927

On 6 April 1927, the judge gave his decision. Later that year, the Chief Court kept the death sentences. Pleas went to the Governor, to the Viceroy and to London. Every door stayed closed.

In December 1927, the four men waited in four different jails. These last chapters follow them there, one by one, starting with the plea that tried to save them.



Seventy-eight names for the Viceroy

In 1927, four young men were sentenced to hang for the Kakori case. Leaders from many parties, who did not agree with each other on much else, signed a plea for their lives.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

When the Kakori judgment came, in April 1927, many people in India were shocked. Three young men had been sentenced to death. A fourth, Ashfaqulla Khan, would soon follow.

The whole country was "aghast", says the National Book Trust book on the Kakori prisoners. Leaders protested, and members of the Central Legislature wrote to the Viceroy. This is the story of a plea that did not work, and of the people who made it anyway.

Who the four were

Ram Prasad Bismil was a poet and the organiser of the group. Ashfaqulla Khan was his close friend and also a poet. Rajendra Lahiri was a university student of history. Roshan Singh was older than the rest. He had been a village schoolteacher.

The people who spoke up for them came from different parties and different faiths.

The first pleas

After the Chief Court at Lucknow kept the death sentences in August 1927, the next step was mercy. A hanging could still be stopped if a higher authority agreed to a lighter sentence.

📖 **Commute:** to change a punishment into a lighter one. A death sentence can be commuted to life in prison.

Some members of the provincial council wrote first to the Governor of the United Provinces, Sir William Morris. He refused.

when did the Chief Court give its decision? The court history says 11 August 1927. English Wikipedia and the Hindi account say 22 August. The original judgment was not seen, so both dates are shown.

The Viceroy and the memorial

The next plea went higher, to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin. It was a memorandum, or formal request, from Madan Mohan Malaviya, signed by 78 members of the Central Legislature. Three sources give that number.

Among those who signed were Malaviya himself, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, N. C. Kelkar, Lala Lajpat Rai and Govind Ballabh Pant.

Think about that list. Malaviya and Jinnah belonged to different faiths and different parties. On this one matter, their names stood on the same page.

Other well-known people also spoke for the accused, including Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru. Some writers say that Mahatma Gandhi asked for mercy too. The two sources that mention this say it carefully, "reportedly" and "claimed", so it stays a maybe.

The Viceroy said no. A delegation of five people, led by Malaviya, then went to see the authorities. It also failed.

A letter from the death cell

On 9 September 1927, Ram Prasad Bismil wrote a letter from Gorakhpur jail to Malaviya. Two sources mention it, but its words have not come down to us.

The last door: London

The highest court that Indians could reach was the Privy Council in London. It was also possible to ask the King-Emperor himself.

▣ **Privy Council:** a group of senior advisers in London. In those days, it was the last court of appeal for people in British India.

The lawyer Mohan Lal Saxena wrote the petition. He sent it to a man in England named S. L. Polak, who was to hand it in. The final appeal was dated 16 September 1927, and it went to both the Privy Council and the King-Emperor, through Henry Polak.

It was turned down.

The officials in London called Bismil a dangerous professional criminal. That was the government's view, as one source reports it. The other sources give no reason.

News in the jail

Rajendra Lahiri is said to have written a letter to his friends on 14 December 1927. In it, he says that the day before, he heard that the Privy Council had turned down his appeal. "You have done everything to save my life but it seems that the country needs my life," the book gives as his words.

Roshan Singh is said to have written on 13 December, telling his friend not to feel sorry for him.

these letters could not be checked against the originals. They come from a book written in 2009, more than eighty years later. They are given as that book gives them, not as proven words.

What the appeal did to the others

The plea was for four lives. But the Chief Court's decision had also changed the lives of other accused men. The judges made the sentences heavier for five of them: Jogesh Chandra Chatterji, Suresh Chandra Bhattacharji, Vishnu Saran Dublish, Govind Charan Kar and Pranavesh Kumar Chatterji.

Some of the accused had been defended in court by well-known lawyers. Others had no lawyer of their own. C. B. Gupta and H. N. Misra spoke up for those who had nobody.

The days in December

After the plea failed, the British government fixed the dates. The four men were to be hanged by 16 December, says one source. English Wikipedia says by 19 December.

Rajendra Lahiri was hanged on 17 December 1927 in the Gonda jail. The other three were hanged on the morning of 19 December. Bismil was hanged at Gorakhpur. Roshan Singh was hanged at Allahabad. Ashfaqulla Khan was hanged at Faizabad.

why was Lahiri hanged two days early? The National Book Trust book says the government feared that his friends might free him from the jail. It says Chandrashekhar Azad and Manmathnath Gupta had come to Gonda for that purpose, and that someone leaked the plan. Another source gives no reason at all. No government record was seen, so it stays an unproven story.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

A slip in one book: the National Book Trust book says Ashfaqulla was hanged in 1929. The same book says Bismil, hanged on the same day, died in 1927. All the other sources say 1927.

After the hangings

The people of Gorakhpur took Bismil's body around the city, and people showered flowers and money on it, says the National Book Trust book. After the four were hanged, their group changed its name and its aims. It became the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Why "Association"?: Before September 1928 the group was called the HRA, the Hindustan Republican Association. After that it was the HSRA, with "Socialist" added.

Why it matters

A plea can fail and still mean something. The 78 names did not save the four men.

But they show that in 1927, people who disagreed about nearly everything were able to agree on one thing. They felt that these young men, whatever they had done, should not be hanged.

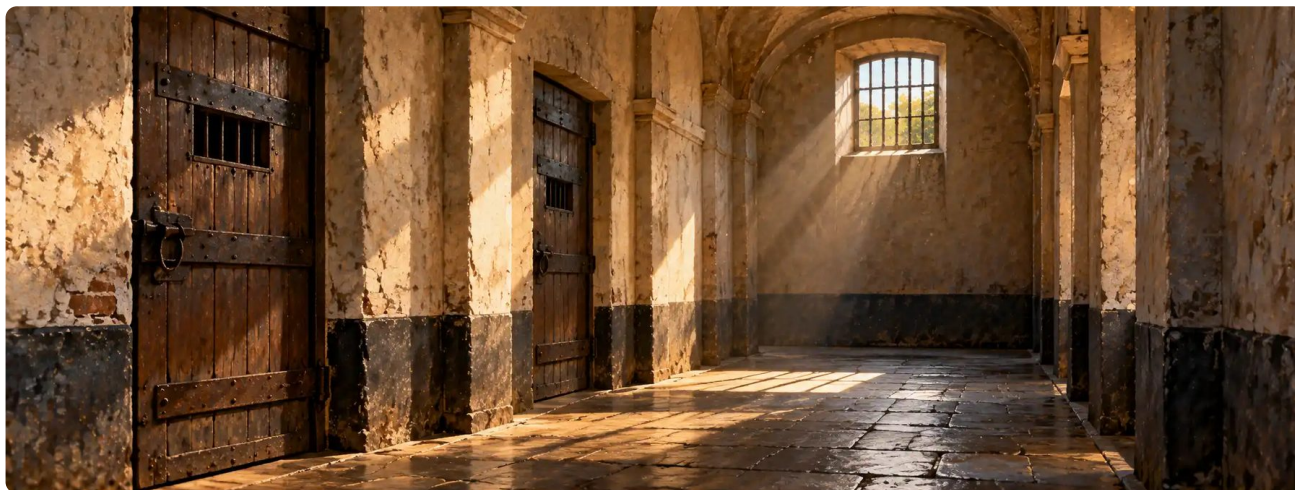
The government saw it differently. According to the Hindi account, officials in London thought Bismil was too dangerous to be spared. Both views were real, and both belong in the story.

Talk about it

1. Malaviya and Jinnah belonged to different parties and faiths, yet both signed. What does that show?
2. The plea failed. Was it still worth making? Why?

Two days early

Four men were sentenced to death in the Kakori case. Three were hanged on 19 December 1927. Rajendranath Lahiri was hanged on the 17th.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

Four men were sentenced to die for Kakori. On the same day, 19 December 1927, three of them were hanged in different jails.

The fourth was Rajendranath Lahiri. He was hanged two days before. Why?

Four jails

On 6 April 1927, the judge, Mr. Hamilton, sentenced Ram Prasad Bismil, Rajendranath Lahiri and Roshan Singh to death. The Allahabad High Court's history says so. Ashfaqulla Khan was sentenced to death in a separate trial.

Appeals followed. The National Book Trust book says an appeal to the Privy Council was also made and rejected.

The four men were then held in different places. Bismil was hanged in Gorakhpur, Roshan Singh in Allahabad and Ashfaqulla Khan in Faizabad. Lahiri was in Gonda jail.

The lonely months

Lahiri spent the last six months of his life in the jails of Gonda and Barabanki. He was very lonely there, *The Wire* says.

He wrote two letters that the book prints. In the first, on 6 October, he thanked everyone who had pleaded for him. In the second, on 14 December, he wrote that his friends had done everything to save his life.

We have not seen the original letters. We use the words that the book prints.

The date moved

All four hangings were planned for 19 December. But Lahiri was hanged two days earlier, on 17 December, in Gonda. The book and The Wire give the same dates.

Both also say why. The authorities feared that revolutionaries would try to free Lahiri from the jail.

The book gives more. Chandrashekhar Azad and Manmath Nath Gupta had come to Gonda. A meeting about the rescue was held at the house of a man named Lal Behari Tandon. A traitor passed on the plan, the book says, and so Lahiri was hanged earlier.

The likeliest reason was a plan to break him out, led by Manmath Nath Gupta's group.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Not confirmed: the two accounts agree on the reason. But neither shows an official order from the jail or the government. The Wikipedia page on Lahiri gives no reason at all. We know the dates. We cannot prove the reason.

Words we cannot check

The book also tells a story about Lahiri's last night, with a conversation between him and a jail officer. It then gives a set of last words.

We have no record that we could check against what was said at the time. So we leave them out. Nobody should put words in a person's mouth in a history for children.

A note about his age

One account says he was hanged at the age of 24. But by that account's own birth year of 1901, he would have been 26. Wikipedia also says he was 26.

If the National Book Trust's year of 1892 is right, he was about 35. So even his age at the end is not settled.

Why it matters

Many people remember the four men's names together. But their last days were not the same.

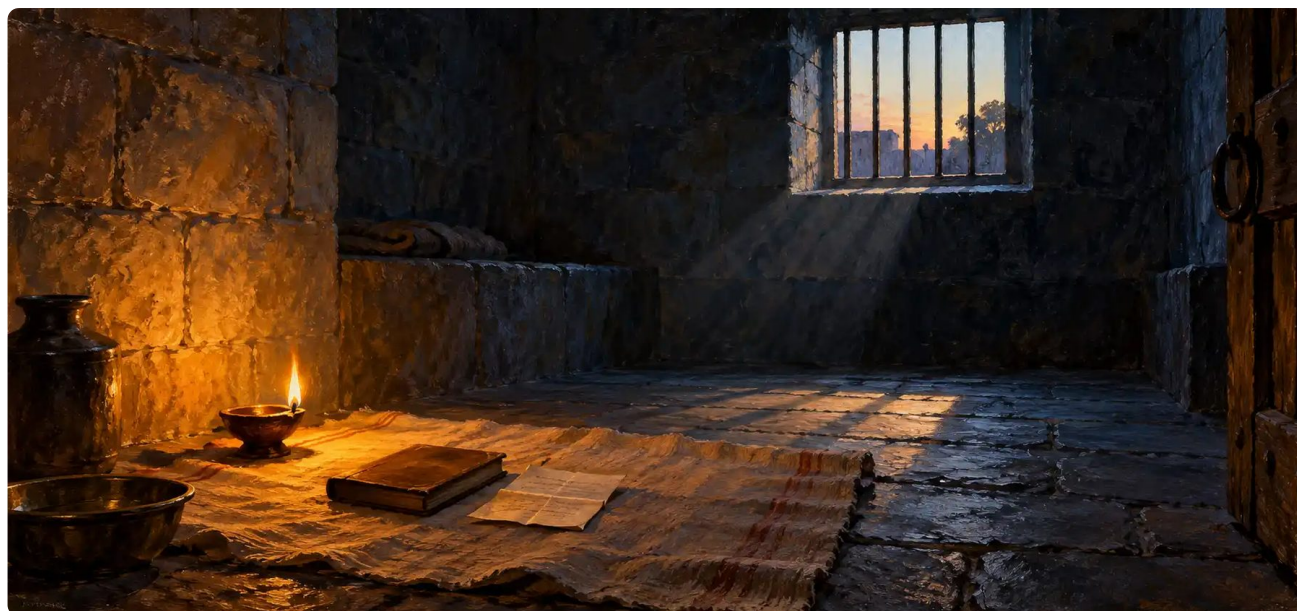
Checking one small date shows a gap in what we know. A good historian says what is certain, and also says what is not.

Talk about it

1. The story leaves out Lahiri's reported last words on purpose. Do you agree with that choice? Why?
2. What reason is given for the hanging being moved, and why does the story say it cannot be proven?

Two weeks in December

In December 1927, Thakur Roshan Singh waited in a jail in Allahabad. We have two accounts of the letter he wrote, two names for the jail, and one story of how he faced the end. Here is what the sources say, and where they part.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

By December 1927, all the appeals were over. The Chief Court at Lucknow had kept the death sentences. Pleas to the Viceroy and to London had failed.

Thakur Roshan Singh was in a jail in Allahabad. He was waiting for 19 December. This story is about those last days. We have to be careful with it. Almost everything we know about them was written down later, by other people.

The name of the jail

Where was he held? The answer depends on whom you ask.

He was held in the jail at Allahabad, now called Prayagraj.

The jail has more than one name in print. English Wikipedia and the National Book Trust book say Allahabad Jail. A Lucknow newspaper calls it Malaka Prison, in Allahabad. Webdunia, a Hindi website, calls it Naini Jail, and also Malaka Jail. Garima Times says Naini Jail in Prayagraj. Naini and Malaka are names tied to the jails of that city. They may be names for one place or for two jails near each other.

Waiting

A few small scenes survive from the waiting months.

Roshan Singh learned Bengali in jail. When Bismil asked him what use that was, if he was going to be hanged, he answered that it would help him in his next life. He also read a Marathi newspaper, and enjoyed it.

One day a lawyer came and told him a mercy appeal had been filed. Roshan Singh answered calmly, "It is O.K." Later the jail superintendent told him the appeal had been turned down. Again he said, "It is O.K."

👁 **WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER**

A word of care: these scenes come from a book written in 2009. We could not find them in any older record. We pass them on as the book tells them.

The letter

A letter is said to have survived. But there are two versions of it, with two different dates.

One version is dated 13 December 1927. Roshan Singh wrote to a friend: "I will be hanged during this week. It is my prayer to God that he should reward you for the affection shown towards me. You need not feel sorry for me. My death is a symbol of happiness. One who is born has to die. This is a fact of life."

The other version is dated 6 December, and it is fuller. In it he says the hanging will be within a week. He asks his friend not to grieve, and says that his death should be a reason for happiness. He says that everyone who is born must die. A person should not bring shame on himself by doing wicked things, he writes, and should remember God at the time of death. He has been apart from his children for two years, and this time gave him plenty of chances to pray. His wish for worldly things is gone.

The letter ends with a couplet of his own, Webdunia says. The line means: live your life with spirit, Roshan, or many people here die every day anyway.

Was the letter written on 13 December or on 6 December? The two letters are alike in what they say. Both ask the friend not to grieve. Both say that death comes to everyone. But Webdunia's own letter says "within a week", and 6 December is almost two weeks before 19 December. The 13 December date fits better. Neither source shows the original. It is not clear which date is right, or whether there were two letters.

The morning

The date was 19 December 1927. Bismil was to be hanged in Gorakhpur and Ashfaqulla Khan in Faizabad on the same morning. Lahiri had already been hanged at Gonda, two days earlier.

Roshan Singh went to the gallows holding the Bhagavad Gita, with a smile on his face, reciting "Vande Mataram" and "Om", says the National Book Trust book.

Another account adds more. He slept a few hours the night before, and then spent the night in prayer. In the morning he bathed, said his prayers and read a little from the Gita. Then he told the guard to take him. The guard wondered whether he was a man or a god. He bowed to his cell, walked to the gallows with the Gita in his hand, and shouted "Vande Mataram" three times.

A third account says that he recited the Gita, and that he shouted "Vande Mataram" as he faced the end.

Three sources agree on two things, the Gita and the cry of "Vande Mataram". Beyond that, the details come from one source each.

The funeral

Thousands of men, women, young people and old people gathered at the jail gate, Webdunia says. The crowd shouted slogans as the body was brought out. There was a large procession to the Sangam, where the Ganga and Yamuna meet, and the body was cremated there in the Vedic way.

We found this in only one source. We do not know how many came, or what they did.

What is left

There was a statue of Roshan Singh at the spot where the gallows once stood in Naini, says Webdunia. A medical college stands on that site today. The statue carries the couplet from the letter.

Another statue of him stands in his own village, Nawada, say Garima Times and a second paper, Panchjanya. We have not seen either statue.

Why it matters

These last days are very hard to know. We do not have a jail diary or an official report of what he said. What we have are books and websites, written years later, in the voice of admirers.

That is not worthless. It shows what people wanted to remember about him: a calm man who prayed, and who told his friend not to grieve. But a careful reader keeps two columns. In one goes what many sources say. In the other goes what only one source says. This story has tried to keep both columns clear.

Talk about it

1. The story says to keep two columns: what many sources say, and what only one source says. Try this on one passage.
2. The letter exists in two versions with two dates. What would help you decide which is right?

The last morning in Faizabad

On 19 December 1927, a young poet walked out of his cell in Faizabad jail for the last time. He carried a copy of the Quran, and he was not afraid.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

In 1927, Ashfaqulla Khan sat in a small cell in Faizabad jail. He had been sentenced to death for his part in the Kakori train robbery.

His lawyers appealed. In August 1927, two judges of the Chief Court in Lucknow, Sir Louis Stuart and Justice Raza, heard the appeals in the Kakori case. They did not change his sentence. Four men would hang: Ashfaq, his friend Bismil, Rajendra Lahiri and Roshan Singh.

His fellow prisoner in the second trial, Sachindra Nath Bakshi, was luckier. He was sentenced to prison for life instead.

There was nothing more to be done.

A diary in a cell

Ashfaq was alone in his cell. But he was not idle.

A memorial trust in Faizabad says that he kept a diary while he was in prison. One line from it is often quoted: "Only for the love of our country I suffer so much."

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

Is the diary real? The memorial trust has printed parts of it. But historians have not yet been able to check the words against the original handwritten pages. So we call them words "said to be" his.

Not a murderer

Ashfaq was a deeply religious man. He believed that God knew what was in his heart.

During the robbery at Kakori, a passenger had been killed by mistake. Ashfaq did not want people to think of him as a murderer. Before he died, he said that his hands were not stained with anyone's murder.

The morning

The date was set: 19 December 1927.

That morning, one biography says, Ashfaq woke early. He bathed. He prayed. He read from the Quran, as he did every day.

Then the guards came for him.

He walked out of his cell carrying a bag. Inside was his copy of the Quran. He walked calmly.

🔍 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

His last words: books tell this moment in different ways. One says he called out "Khuda Hafiz", which means "May God protect you", a way of saying goodbye. Others say he recited the Kalma, the Muslim declaration of faith. Nobody wrote his words down at the time, so we cannot know exactly.

Two friends, one day

Ashfaq did not die alone in spirit. On that same morning, his closest friend, Ram Prasad Bismil, was hanged too, in Gorakhpur jail, far away.

Two days earlier, another comrade, Rajendra Lahiri, had been hanged in Gonda. Roshan Singh was hanged on 19 December too, in Allahabad.

Four young men gave their lives for the Kakori case.

What he left behind

Ashfaq left behind a handful of poems, a few photographs, and a story.

His name is still said together with his friend's: Bismil and Ashfaq.

He was 27 years old. He had spent the last year of his life in a prison cell, writing.

“Only for the love of our country I suffer so much.”

Ashfaqulla Khan, in words said to come from his prison diary

Said to be his. The memorial trust has printed parts of the diary, but historians have not yet checked the words against the original pages.

Talk about it

1. Ashfaq said his hands were not stained with anyone's murder. Why might that have mattered to him?
2. The story says nobody wrote his last words down at the time. What do we lose, and what do we keep?

Written on scraps of paper

In his last months, in a death cell in Gorakhpur jail, Ram Prasad Bismil secretly wrote the story of his life. What did he choose to tell? And what had he changed his mind about?



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

Imagine you have only a few weeks left to live. You are locked in a prison cell. You have no proper notebook, only scraps of paper. And the guards must not find out what you are writing. What would you write?

In 1927, in Gorakhpur jail, Ram Prasad Bismil faced exactly that. He had been sentenced to death for the Kakori train robbery. And he decided to write the story of his life.

A book in secret

Bismil wrote on loose scraps of paper. The pages were smuggled out of the jail. According to the book *Hanged for Patriotism*, he wrote the last pages on 17 December 1927. Two days later, he was hanged.

The book was printed only after his death. One of its Hindi titles is *Nij Jivan Ki Chhata*. In 2025, almost a hundred years later, a new English translation by Awadhesh Tripathi came out, called *A Glimpse of My Life*.

📖 **Autobiography:** the story of a person's life, written by that person.

Here are some of the things Bismil chose to tell.

Two hundred banned books

As a young man, Bismil had helped publish a Hindi book about how America won its freedom from Britain. The government of his province banned it and seized copies.

But Bismil's group still wanted to sell it. Their chance came at a big meeting of the Congress party in Delhi.

Bismil wrote that he was there in the uniform of an ambulance volunteer. He hid about two hundred copies of the banned book under his overcoat. Then he walked them out of an Arya Samaj camp, right past the police.

Over the wall

He also wrote about a narrow escape in Shahjahanpur. One night the police raided, and the young men found a door locked against them. So they climbed over a wall.

On the other side, a police daroga stopped them. They told him they were students, and he let them go. Afterwards, they buried their guns and left for Prayag.

📖 **Daroga**: a police officer in charge of a police station.

The comrade who fired at him

Not every story in the book is about brave tricks. Some are about trust going wrong.

During the Mainpuri years, some members of his group decided that one of their comrades was too weak. They planned to kill him. Bismil objected. "It is not right to kill another human being," he wrote.

Later, he was sitting on the bank of the Yamuna near Prayag. One of those same men fired a pistol at him, from about two yards away.

Bismil survived. He fled to Lucknow.

His mother's promise

Bismil was furious. He wanted revenge on the man who had tried to kill him. He fell ill with fever.

His mother came to him. She asked him to make a promise: "Promise me that you will not kill the man who tried to murder you."

At first he did not want to. But in the end, he gave his word. He wrote that after he promised, his fever began to go down.

📖 **His mother**: her name was Moolmati. According to Hanged for Patriotism, she came to see him in Gorakhpur jail the day before he was hanged.

A farmer in hiding

For a long time after that, Bismil lived in hiding. He worked in the fields like a farmer, and hardly anyone recognised him.

His family paid a heavy price. Because of the warrant for his arrest, his father sold the family house. It had been worth 2,000 rupees. He sold it for only 800. The money went for his sisters' weddings, and his parents were left almost penniless.

Even then, Bismil kept reading and writing. He had learned Bengali in memory of a friend who had died, Sushil Chandra Sen. He even named his younger brother Sushil after him. Now he translated Bengali books into Hindi, and printed them as a series.

He did some of his translating while out herding animals, which he called "rather amusing". The books lost him about 500 rupees.

When the government pardoned the political prisoners, he finally came home to Shahjahanpur. He wrote that he had been sure he would never walk freely in his town again.

Ashfaq

The book also speaks of Ashfaqulla Khan, his friend from Shahjahanpur. Bismil was a Hindu, and Ashfaq a Muslim. A reviewer of the book, the historian Salil Misra, calls Ashfaq Bismil's "soulmate". He says the book comes back again and again to Hindu-Muslim unity, through that friendship.

Misra is honest about Bismil's other side too. He points out that Bismil also took part in an Arya Samaj campaign called Shuddhi, which Misra describes as generally hostile to Muslims. Real people can hold ideas that pull in different directions.

A change of mind

The most surprising part of the book comes near the end.

Bismil had spent years in secret groups, planning to fight British rule with weapons. But in his cell, he looked back, and he began to have doubts.

He wrote that it might have been better "if we had directed our efforts towards educating the masses and spreading awareness among them". And he wrote: "I am now convinced that no revolutionary organisation can be successful in India."

📖 **The masses:** ordinary people, all over the country.

He left a message for the young people of India. "My final message to the youth is that they should choose to serve the nation sincerely," he wrote. He hoped villagers would become true patriots, wearing khadi and using swadeshi goods made in India.

👁 WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

One reader's view: these lines are quoted from the review by Salil Misra. He reads them as a sign that Bismil was questioning violent methods. Other readers may weigh the book differently, so it is worth reading the whole of it.

Why it matters

Bismil could have used his last weeks to write only about his bravest deeds. He did write about some of them. But he also wrote about his fears, his mistakes, his mother, his debts and his doubts.

That is what makes his book special. It is not the story of a statue. It is the story of a real young man, thinking hard about his life, with the gallows only days away.

Talk about it

1. Bismil wrote about his mistakes and doubts as well as his brave deeds. Why does that make his book more believable?
2. He changed his mind near the end. Why is it important that a person can do that?

EPILOGUE

After

From December 1927 to today

The men who were hanged never saw India free. But the group went on without them. It changed its name and took up socialist ideas. It became the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, the group that Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad belonged to.



The grave, the statue and the film

Ashfaqulla Khan was hanged at 27. What happened after? His family, his grave in Shahjahanpur, a statue in the jail where he died, and a film that made a new generation ask who he was.



Painting made with AI for this book. It shows the scene; it is not a photograph.

Ashfaqulla Khan was hanged on 19 December 1927. He was 27 years old. For him, the story ended there. For the people who remembered him, it did not.

This story is about what came after. It is about a family, a grave, a statue and a film. It is also about a friendship that people still talk about.

The place where he died

Ashfaq was hanged in the district jail at Faizabad. The platform where it happened is still there, says the National Book Trust book on the Kakori prisoners. A life-size statue of Ashfaq now stands at the place.

Only one source says so, but a memorial website agrees about the jail. It calls the Faizabad jail Ashfaq's "final home", the place where he wrote his last verses.

His grave

He is buried in his home town, Shahjahanpur. There is a memorial grave there, called the Ashfaqullah Khan Smarak, and people gather there every 19 December. ThePrint, a news website, also says a memorial grave was set up in Shahjahanpur.

the memorial website is run by admirers of Ashfaq and does not name its makers. It is trusted here for the grave and the gathering, because ThePrint says the same. It is not relied on for things no one else says.

No source describes the burial itself. Who was there, and what was said, is not on record.

What happened to his family

Ashfaq's grandson, Shahdabullah, remembers what came after the hanging. The British government took away the family's property. His grandmother's family was well off, and that helped the family to get by.

He also said something sad. People seem to remember Ashfaq only twice a year, on Independence Day and on the day he died.

These are one man's words about his own family. They are not a record from a court. Still, they remind us that a hanging leaves a family behind.

His father's side was Pathan, and his father was a kotwal, a police officer in the old style. His eldest brother told him stories of Bismil's bravery and his Urdu poetry, long before the two men met. This too is the grandson's account.

A friend's words

Ashfaq's best-known friend was Ram Prasad Bismil. In his own autobiography, written in prison, Bismil wrote a whole passage addressed to Ashfaq.

Ashfaq started as a friend and became like a brother, Bismil wrote. People were surprised that a devout Arya Samaj Hindu and a devout Muslim could be friends. When friends doubted Ashfaq, he walked straight ahead on his own path. When some Muslims scolded him for his friendship, he paid no attention.

The newspaper Counterview says Bismil's memoir uses this friendship as proof that Hindu-Muslim unity is possible. Ashfaq, before his execution, asked Hindus and Muslims to stop quarrelling and work together for the country.

Bismil made one more point in the same memoir. Men who took part in communal riots were given lighter punishments, he wrote, while freedom fighters who avoided needless violence were given death. Ashfaq was one of those freedom fighters. This is Bismil's opinion, not a court finding.

His own words

Ashfaq wrote poems under pen names. The National Book Trust book gives them as Varsi and Hazrat. The memorial website and Wikipedia give the name Hasrat.

In one poem he says he lives only to serve his motherland. In another, he says that whether he gets a long sentence or the death sentence, he will sing her praises even with chained hands.

Three days before the hanging, he wrote a poem in Faizabad jail. One line in English reads: "Worn down by their tyranny, we depart toward nothingness from Faizabad's prison."

the original handwriting of these poems was not seen. They are given as the book and the website give them, and are not called certain.

A new name for the group

After Ashfaq, Bismil, Lahiri and Roshan Singh were hanged, their group went on without them. It changed its name and took up socialist ideas. It became the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. This was the group Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad belonged to.

The film

In 2006, a Hindi film called *Rang De Basanti* brought Ashfaqulla Khan onto the screen. An actor named Kunal Kapoor played him.

There are two other screen roles. One is in a television series called *Chandrashekhar*. The other is in *Mujahid-E-Azadi: Ashfaqullah Khan*, a programme shown on the channel DD Urdu in 2014.

A film is not history. It is a story told for a cinema audience. But it can make people curious, and curiosity is a good place to start. For some viewers, it may have been the first time they heard his name.

What is known, and what is not

The time and place of the hanging are known. The family says where he is remembered. Some of his words have come down in books and websites.

Much is still missing. Nobody has written who attended his burial. His original letters have not been found. And there is no full account of what his family went through after 1927.

Why it matters

A young man died for a cause when he was 27. Almost a hundred years later, he is still being talked about.

Part of the reason is his friendship with a man of another faith. Part is his poems. And part is that people keep telling his story, in jails, on screens, and in books for children. If you want to go further, ask a grown-up to take you to a library. There, you can look up Bismil's autobiography and read what he wrote about his friend.

Talk about it

1. Why is a film “not history”, according to the story, and why can it still be useful?
2. What is still not known about Ashfaq, according to the last section of the chapter?

Where the records disagree

Twelve questions about Kakori that the sources answer differently. A good historian shows the gap instead of hiding it.

Question	What the sources say	What this book does
How much money was taken?	4,553 rupees, 3 annas, 6 pies (High Court history). 4,601 rupees, 15 annas, 6 pies (the police report). About 8,000 rupees (English Wikipedia).	All three are shown. None explains the gap.
Who fired the shot that killed Ahmad Ali?	The court history does not say. English Wikipedia says Manmathnath Gupta, by accident. A newspaper report calls it an accidental shot.	The chapters say who is named, and by whom.
Who pulled the chain?	The Wire says Lahiri is said to have pulled it. A National Book Trust book says Lahiri, Ashfaqulla Khan and Sachindranath Bakshi got down from a second-class compartment. Other accounts name no one.	Treated as “said to”, not as certain.
Was Roshan Singh on the train?	Two sources (a National Book Trust book and English Wikipedia) say he was not. A government book, reported by another researcher, is said to place him there; it could not be opened.	We follow the two we could read, and say so.
When did the trial begin?	4 January 1926 (National Book Trust book). 1 May 1926 (English Wikipedia). The court history says it lasted “about 8 months”.	Both dates shown; at least one is off.
Who was the judge?	Mr Hamilton (court history, the book, English Wikipedia). A Hindi account says Ainuddin.	We follow the three that agree.
When did the Chief Court give its decision?	11 August 1927 (court history). 22 August 1927 (both Wikipedias).	Both dates shown.
Why was Lahiri hanged two days early?	One book says the government feared a rescue attempt. No other source gives a reason, and no official order was seen.	Kept as an unproven story.
When was Lahiri born?	1901 (The Wire, Wikipedia). 1892 (National Book Trust book).	Both shown; his age at death is not settled.
When did Roshan Singh write his last letter?	13 December 1927 (one version) or 6 December (a fuller version). The originals were not seen.	Labelled; the 13 December date fits “within a week” better.
Which jail was Roshan Singh held in?	Allahabad Jail, Malaka Prison or Naini Jail. These may be one place or two jails near each other.	Called “Allahabad” in the introductions; the chapter explains.
When was Ashfaqulla arrested?	7 December 1926 (most sources). 17 July 1926 (one account).	Most sources followed; the other noted.

Quiz time

Twelve questions from the book. Answers are on the Answers page.

-  **1.** What was the number of the train that was stopped near Kakori?
- A. 8 Down
 - B. 12 Up
 - C. Number 3
-  **2.** Whose Mauser pistol was handed to Manmathnath Gupta?
- A. Bismil's
 - B. Ashfaqulla Khan's
 - C. Azad's
-  **3.** What were the passengers told?
- A. To get off and run
 - B. To stay inside, because only government money was wanted
 - C. To give up their luggage
-  **4.** What was Ahmad Ali's job?
- A. Train guard
 - B. Policeman
 - C. Lawyer
-  **5.** Which of the four hanged men, according to two sources, was not on the train?
- A. Roshan Singh
 - B. Lahiri
 - C. Bismil
-  **6.** For which robbery was Roshan Singh sentenced?
- A. Kakori
 - B. Bamrauli
 - C. Dwarkapur
-  **7.** In what language was the first police report written?
- A. English
 - B. Hindi
 - C. Urdu

 **8.** Who was the government's lawyer in the trial?

- A. Pandit Jagat Narain
- B. C. B. Gupta
- C. Govind Ballabh Pant

 **9.** How many members of the Central Legislature signed the memorandum to the Viceroy?

- A. 18
- B. 78
- C. 108

 **10.** Which of the four was hanged first, on 17 December 1927?

- A. Rajendra Lahiri
- B. Roshan Singh
- C. Ashfaqulla Khan

 **11.** What job did Ashfaqulla do while hiding in Daltonganj?

- A. Teacher
- B. Clerk
- C. Farmer

 **12.** On what did Bismil write his life story in Gorakhpur jail?

- A. Scraps of paper
- B. A bound diary
- C. A typewriter

Activities

1. Be a source detective

Take one of these disagreements. Write down the two versions, then answer the questions.

- The money taken at Kakori (three different amounts).
- When the trial began (4 January 1926 or 1 May 1926).
- When Roshan Singh wrote his last letter (13 December or 6 December 1927).

Version A says: _____

Version B says: _____

Which would you trust more, and why? _____

What would you check to settle it? _____

2. Four seats, one train

Pick one person from the night: Lahiri, Ashfaqulla, Azad, Ahmad Ali or Roshan Singh. Write three sentences about what the night looked like from where that person was, using only things the chapters tell you. Then underline anything you had to guess.

3. The question you would ask

If you could ask one question of one person in this book, who would it be, and what would you ask? Why do you think nobody wrote the answer down?

Answers

Quiz

1. A 2. B 3. B 4. C 5. A 6. B 7. C 8. A 9. B 10. A 11. B 12. A

The “Talk about it” questions and the activities have no single right answer. For younger readers, ask them to point to the sentence in the book that made them think so.

Certificate of Curiosity

This certificate is awarded to

for reading the Kakori story and asking who says so.

Glossary

Annas and pies

in those days a rupee was divided into 16 annas, and each anna into 12 pies. So 15 annas and 6 pies was nearly one more rupee.

Autobiography

the story of a person's life, written by that person.

Bamrauli

the first of the four robberies in the case. It happened on Christmas night in 1924, in the Pilibhit district. It was not at Kakori.

Clerk

someone who works in an office, writing letters, keeping accounts and filing papers.

Commute

to change a punishment into a lighter one. A death sentence can be commuted to life in prison.

Conspiracy

a secret plan, made by a group of people, to do something against the law.

Dacoity

a robbery by a gang. In the old law, a dacoity in which someone is killed was punished very hard.

Daroga

a police officer in charge of a police station.

FIR

First Information Report. It is the first written report the police make about a crime.

HRA

the Hindustan Republican Association, a secret group set up in 1924. In 1928 it became the HSRA, with Azad as its leader.

Loyalty

being faithful to your friends, even when things are hard. It does not always mean agreeing with them.

Maulvi

a Muslim scholar and teacher. In those days, many children in north India learned Urdu from one.

Mushaira

a gathering where poets read out their poems, usually in Urdu, to a live audience.

Pen name

a name a writer uses instead of their real one. Ram Prasad used three: Ram, Agyat ("unknown") and Bismil. Bismil means "wounded".

Privy Council

a group of senior advisers in London. In those days, it was the last court of appeal for people in British India.

Robbery

here, a group of men attacking a place or a train to steal money. The old word for it was "dacoity".

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Also in this series

Bhagat Singh: Six True Stories. The group in this book, the HRA, became the HSRA after December 1927, the group Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad belonged to.